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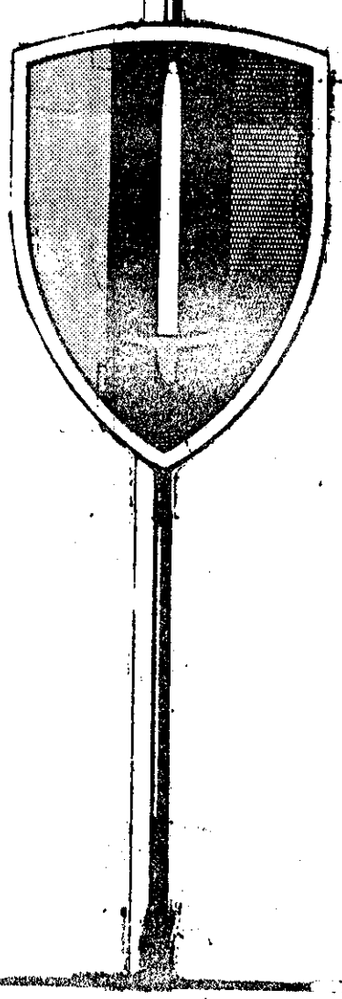
UNITED STATES ARMY VIETNAM



BATTLEFIELD REPORTS

MAY 1971

TIPS FOR COMMANDERS

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY VIETNAM
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96375

20 MAY 1971

AVHDO-DO

SUBJECT: Tips for Commanders

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1. The attached document is a compilation of experiences and lessons learned in combat, combat support, and combat service support units operating in all areas of the Republic of Vietnam. The purpose of this publication is to give all United States forces an opportunity to share the benefits of other units' experiences.

2. It is recognized that tactics and techniques which prove successful in a given area may not render the same results in all sections of the country. However, the United States fighting man, with strong leadership and inherent ingenuity, will quickly recognize and overcome these differences where they exist.

3. Tactics and doctrine set forth in field manuals and taught at service schools are sound; however, the soldier doing the job in the field is in the best position to tell us where improvement and changes in techniques can be made. We are remiss if we fail to take advantage of his knowledge and his combat experience.

4. This document will be published on a quarterly basis, using information contained in Operational Report-Lessons Learned and items submitted by subordinate commands and staff agencies. Subordinate commands are invited to submit items for inclusion to CG, USARV, APO 96375, ATTN: AVHDO-DO. Recognition of submissions will be given.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

CHARLES M. GETTYS
Major General, USA
Chief of Staff

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(C) TIPS FOR COMMANDERS (U)

1. (C) OPERATIONS:

a. Accidental Discharge of M-60 Machineguns. When the M-60 Machinegun is carried with ammunition loaded, it is not uncommon for the safety lever to be on the "fire" position either through neglect or from contact with dense jungle foliage. Accidental discharges have been known to occur when the trigger is struck by brush or the gunner's equipment. If the weapon is to be capable of being put into action to engage the fleeting targets common to guerrilla warfare, it must be loaded, but the gun can be carried in the "half cock" position. The bolt is pulled back and the chamber is inspected to insure that the weapon is clear. The feed tray cover is then closed. The bolt is eased forward so that it is no longer in the firing position. The ammunition is then fed into the weapon until it clicks into place. The weapon cannot be fired accidentally, but it can be put into action simply by pulling the bolt back and placing the selector in the "fire" position. (173d Abn Bde)

b. Flamethrowers Fight Fires. In areas remote from available fire-fighting equipment, portable flamethrowers charged with "Lite Water" have proved effective putting out fires. "Lite Water", a soap concentrate, produces blanketing foam when mixed with water and sprayed under pressure. It is available through the supply system. (101st Abn Div)

c. Handling of Grenades. Several accidents have occurred when personnel attempted to correct the slippage of the striker pivot pin on the M26 hand grenade. This pin, located just forward of the safety pin, is force-fitted into the fuze assemply during production and is held in position by the snugness of the fit. However, it has recently been observed that striker-pivot pins on several grenades have worked their way partly out of the fuze assembly. If this occurs, a possibility exists that the travel of the striker will be affected sufficiently to prevent its contacting the cap when released, and the grenade will fail to detonate. Accordingly, all grenades should be visually inspected before any operation, and at frequent intervals during operations, to insure that the striker pivot pin is correctly seated. If the pin is improperly seated (i.e., protrudes from the fuze assembly), the grenade should be destroyed in place as soon as possible. Under no circumstances should personnel attempt to reseat the pin, as any tampering may allow sufficient clearance for the striker to fall, resulting in an inaudible initiation of the firing train and subsequent detonation. (173d Abn Bde)

d. Land Clearing Operations. Improperly conducted land clearing operations can reduce the support of friendly, local civilians. Instead of totally stripping unnecessarily large areas, selective land clearing operations should be planned and coordinated with local officials. Only boobytrap areas, VC hiding places, and potential ambush sites should be destroyed, leaving all friendly dwellings and land areas undamaged. To

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accomplish this, a local official should help the engineer "tree boss" mark the area to be cleared. Such close coordination increases the support of local civilians and fosters their understanding and cooperation. These longer term benefits should be weighed carefully against any shorter term tactical advantages potentially realized from indiscriminate clearing of large areas. (SODR, 173d Abn Bde)

e. Perimeter Illumination of Outposts. The perimeter of isolated outposts can be illuminated very simply, without electricity. Diesel-fuel candles made from beer cans and cardboard hand grenade cases (see Figure 1) can be placed next to field-expedient reflectors around the perimeter. These candles can be easily and inexpensively constructed using available materials. (Team 96, 40th Group Combat Assistance Team).

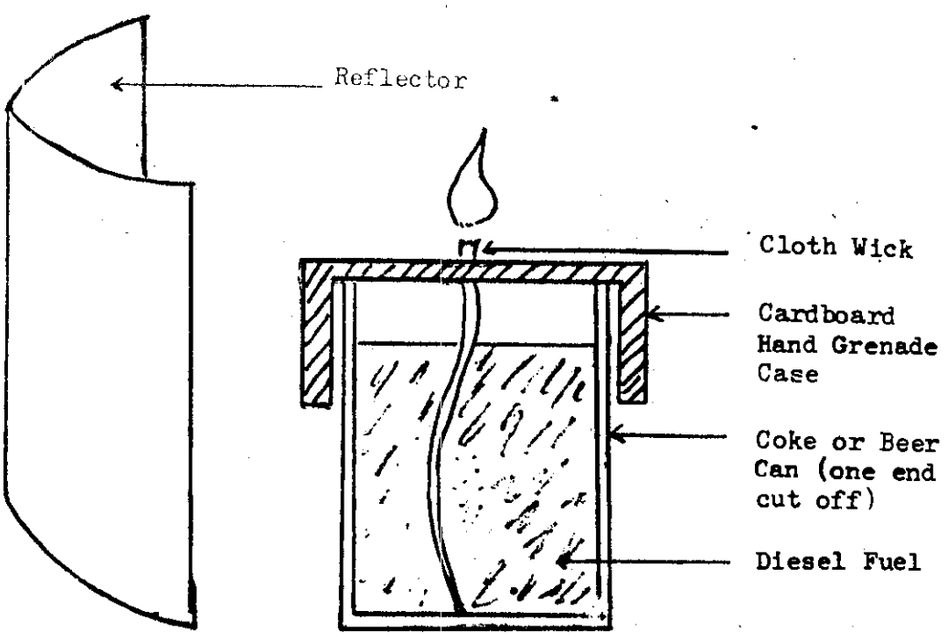

FIGURE 1 (U). Illumination Candle

f. Convoy Escort and Security. A study by the 4th Infantry Division suggests that a truck is the best lead vehicle for convoys. APC's carry more personnel, are closer to a mine explosion, present much larger targets than does a truck cab, and are subject to more spalling and shrapnel effects when hit by rockets. Trucks, therefore, take fewer casualties as the lead vehicle in a convoy. (4th Inf Div)

g. Small Unit Operations. Recently, a rifle platoon was being resupplied by helicopter. Shortly after the aircraft landed, the perimeter came under enemy attack. The helicopter received a hit in the fuel cell and exploded. The position received small-arms and RPG fire from various directions, at distances of 75-100 meters, and the enemy was able to move close enough to employ hand grenades and satchel charges. The attack resulted in the loss of the helicopter, and friendly casualties, both of which could have been avoided.

(1) Events leading up to the attack indicate tactical errors in the conduct of the defense of the position:

(a) The platoon had remained in the same position for six days

(b) The enemy approached within 100 meters of the position undetected

(c) The initiation of the attack by destruction of the resupply helicopter indicates that the enemy had probably been able to observe the routine of the platoon during the previous resupply at the same location. The attack was apparently planned to coincide with the resupply operation in order to cause maximum confusion when the defenders were less alert than usual.

(2) Commanders at all levels should review Standing Operating Procedures to insure the inclusion of provisions for the conduct of the defense of small-unit positions. As a minimum, the following policies should be included:

(a) Units should relocate as frequently as the situation permits;

(b) If the mission requires the unit to remain in one location for only a very limited period of time (i.e., twenty-four hours), listening and observation posts should be established and prone shelters prepared as a minimum;

(c) If the mission requires the unit to remain in the position in excess of twenty-four hours, the position should be continually improved, to include preparation of foxholes and possibly bunkers;

(d) Frequent patrols should be conducted in order to deny the enemy the opportunity to reconnoiter the position and its defenses.

(3) The key to successful defense of a position, regardless of size, rests with the application of the fundamentals of defense. (23d Inf Div)

2. (C) INTELLIGENCE:

a. New Enemy Tactics, Weapons and Equipment. Guards on a bridge engaged two floating objects, destroying one and capturing the other. It was a US 35mm Model E-8 tactical CS launcher, loaded with 16 tubes of CS gas. It is possible that the enemy intended to destroy the bridge with a small sapper element while the guards were incapacitated by the CS gas. If so, this constitutes a novel use of CS gas in naval sapper operations. (TRAC)

b. Enemy Evaluation of US Artillery and Tactical Air. A recent POW interrogation report reveals that the NVA are not afraid of US artillery and tactical air strikes because of the way in which they are employed. US artillery usually fires single rounds to adjust its fire, and by the time they start firing barrages, the enemy has taken cover underground. However, the enemy does fear ARVN artillery, according to the report, because they fire first-round barrages. Along the same lines, tactical airstrikes usually attack only one position at a time, and continue to engage that single target without deviation. The NVA simply move a short distance away from the target and watch the attack, the report says. (SRAC G3)

c. Sapper Demonstration. A hoi chanh, a former VC sapper reconnaissance squad leader, recently demonstrated techniques used by sappers for infiltrating perimeter defenses. The hoi chanh showed Long Binh Post base defense personnel and other interested parties the relative ease with which a trained sapper can breach perimeter wire. He wore only shorts; in his mouth he carried several paper clips and two pieces of wire cut from a coat hanger and fashioned into hooks. He began outside the outermost strand of wire and worked his way in. Primarily moving in a crouch, he sometimes slithered along the ground feet-first, from a semi-seated position, or stepped carefully over wires on all fours. At times he rested in a squatting position. He quickly traversed tanglefoot wire, moving on his hands and feet. Trip flares were disarmed by his inserting a paper clip in the safety-pin hole to prevent the handle from releasing. The hoi chanh moved through concertina wire by separating the wire ahead until an opening was made just large enough to wriggle through. This opening was then secured on each side by the wire hooks he carried. After crawling through the opening, he then released the wire, which returned to its original position. Putting the hooks back into his mouth, he continued to the next wire obstacle, leaving no trace of his path and using natural vegetation to avoid silhouetting. Under daylight demonstration conditions, it took him less than 20 minutes to move through three barriers of triple contertina wire and two barriers of tanglefoot. At another demonstration performed by the same former sapper, he crawled with apparent ease through double apron wire. He stated that a trained sapper has no trouble breaching any type of fencing currently used by Allied Forces, except barbed tape;

this must be cut, or a hole dug under it. He added that all his reconnaissance missions had been conducted at night, usually taking all night. About three hours was needed for inward penetration, rather than the demonstrated 20 minutes, since darkness necessitated moving very slowly in order to feel for trip wires and to keep from being observed by guards. Another three hours had to be allowed for exit through the wire after completing the mission. Extreme caution and patience were constantly required in moving without haste. The wire was never cut.

The former sapper made several suggestions for improvement of barrier defenses. He stated that at least two more rows of concertina were necessary, or a total of five, and that concertina would be more difficult to penetrate if the rolls could be interlaced to provide a denser barrier. This would require more time for a sapper to penetrate, making it more difficult to complete a mission during the hours of darkness. Too few trip flares and trip grenades are used, he said, and trip wires are usually all at the same height and use the same lateral spacing. Trip wires should be arranged at random locations and be much more frequently placed. He also stated that vegetation gives sappers excellent concealment. He believes that chain-link fences would considerably compound a sapper's problems. Concerning the use of dogs, the former sapper stated that they can be evaded through the use of a concoction (defined as some sort of "Chinese Medicine") that disguises human smell when spread on the sapper's body. His comments regarding US guards were that they seem generally inattentive, lazy, and careless. (ACTIV)

3. (C) LOGISTICS:

a. Field Expedient Short Whip Antenna. A substitute whip antenna can be fabricated from existing materials with little maintenance support and will provide approximately the same range capabilities as the manufactured short whip antenna. Unit signal personnel fabricated a short whip antenna from metal banding straps from C-ration containers and sandbags. Two metal straps were cut to a length of 2 feet each, and three sections were cut approximately 1 foot, 3 inches each. These sections were braided together, with the help of maintenance support personnel, by using a soldering iron and tying together the sections with wire. The rubber connector and the antenna adapter were still used; the fabricated antenna was then placed into the end of the rubber connector. Although the banding straps were not so flexible as the manufactured antenna, they did act as an adequate substitute. (4th Inf Div)

b. OH-58A Seat Belts. Structural damage has been incurred in flight from loose, unused seat belts. A caution to passengers should be painted or stenciled on seat backs, to refasten seat belts prior to departing aircraft. DA Form 2038 should include a seat-belt security check on the pilot/co-pilot preflight check list. (34th GS Gp)